

## GOVERNOR'S ADVISORY COUNCIL ON THE BLIND

Smyrna Rest Stop

Conference Room

5500 DuPont Pkwy.

Smyrna, DE

June 1, 2018

**A quorum was determined and the meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM**

### ROLL CALL:

**Council Members:** Council Chair Lloyd Schmitz, Patti Addison, Ken Rolph, Jillian Queen, Pat Carzo, Deidre Morris, Kat Bottner.

**Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) Staff:** Elisha Jenkins, Director; Sandi Miller, Deputy Director; Jill Morrison, Shirley Bryson, Debra Bradl, Matt Tseronis, Erin Weaver, Michele Hamilton, Phone: Melodye May, Andy Kloepper

**Public:** Mary Marsh, Rob Keller, Terry Marsh, Jim Steele, Wayne Marsh

**MINUTES:** Lloyd Schmitz requested a motion to table the May 4, 2018, minutes until the August 3, 2018, meeting. It was determined that not all council members had the opportunity to review them. Ken Rolph made the motion to table the minutes and Jillian Queen seconded the motion. Motion carried.

### DIVISION FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED DIRECTOR'S REPORT-Elisha Jenkins

Elisha Jenkins introduced Sandra Miller as Deputy Director of the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI).

#### **Blind Enterprise Program:**

Preparations are being made for training during the latter part of June which will encompass taste testing conducted by a representative from Public Health, and then, stocking assigned vending machines with 40% healthy choice options. The second part of the training will be conducted by Mr. Nicholas Gacos who is the owner of Colorado Café Associates LLC, a convenience management company located in Jersey City, New Jersey. In 1991, Mr. Gacos entered Business Enterprises of New Jersey and became a licensed blind entrepreneur, operating a series of locations under the Randolph Sheppard Act. In the past year, the company has expanded into the private sector in both micro-markets and vending. Mr. Gacos currently serves as the Chair of the Committee of Blind Managers, President of the National Association of Blind Merchants, and as a member of the Board of Directors of NAMA (National Automatic Merchandising Association). It is the intention of the Delaware Blind Entrepreneurs Program (BEP) to glean ideas and new strategies from Mr. Gacos's experience and knowledge to help expand business opportunities for more blind Delawareans.

Question arose: Will there be an opportunity for BEP orientations?

Response: There will be one scheduled in July 2018; these are scheduled generally twice a year, in coordination with the VR Counselor.

### **Consumer Satisfaction Survey Results:**

Over the past year and a half, one of DVI's mechanisms to obtain feedback is the utilization of survey monkey.

When consumers were asked about their satisfaction with services:

- 62% reported being very satisfied
- 24% reported being satisfied
- 3% neutral
- 8% reported being dissatisfied
- 3% reported being very dissatisfied

There were open-text comments that were both positive and negative. In addition, each program receives monthly consumer satisfaction results obtained by volunteers.

This is one of several options to provide feedback on the agency. Individual programs have additional mechanisms for obtaining feedback. Incentives are provided on a monthly basis with December being a video magnifier or assistive technology for the blind.

### **Independent living services:**

DVI's Annual Beach House Weekend was held on May 18 - 20th at the Children's Beach House in Lewes, Delaware. Twenty-two students participated in Expanded Core Curriculum activities in the areas of self-determination, independent living skills, social interaction, visual efficiency, and compensatory skills. Activities included meal preparation and dining etiquette, country fact hunt with assistive technology devices, Minute to Win It, Braille fortune cookies, Bob-sledding, car parts (exploring what you need to know), Olympic trivia, Pixels with Patti, talent show, rock-climbing, and bowling.

Independent Living Services (ILS) Administrator and Delaware Association of Blind Athletes (DABA) Vice President Melodye May, along with Patricia Addison of Delaware Blindsight, attended On May 19<sup>th</sup>. Ms. May and Ms. Addison conducted a session on the importance of athletics to increase confidence, fitness, and teamwork to the visually impaired and blind students in attendance.

Registration is going well for the Summer Academy scheduled for July 9 – 20, 2018. Thus far, there are nine students registered.

On Wednesday May 16th, DVI co-sponsored Healthy Vision Night held at the Delaware Children's Museum. There were 138 guests who enjoyed free vision screenings, interactive exhibits, and activities for parents and children. Various exhibitors, including the National Federation of the Blind of Delaware, Delaware's Assistive Technology Initiative, and Delmarva Power, provided information on their services, as well. Administrators from DVI's ILS unit and Education unit disseminated information on agency services and Braille.

On May 23th, Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, Roxann EllisWebb, exhibited at the Vida (Living a Healthy Lifestyle) event held at the Milford Library. This was an outreach event to the Hispanic

community and featured free health screenings as well as other exhibitors. Health fair attendees asked questions regarding DVI services and programs, and literature regarding the Division was also disseminated to the attendees.

On Friday, May 25th, the ILS Unit hosted a Paratransit information session. Representatives from Paratransit offered an overview of changes to services and other updates, disseminated information and answered questions. There were 14 participants who attended.

Lloyd Schmitz shared that DART has available announcers talking in real time, reporting at bus stops in Sussex and possibly Kent County. This is motion activated, as well as push button, and announces bus routes for that location and how long before the bus is expected to arrive. If a consumer requests to have the announcements at their bus stop, they should be directed to contact DART.

### **Education Services:**

Public meetings on the Division's Unified English Braille (UEB) Plan were conducted on:

1. Thursday, May 17, at the Division's location in New Castle County.
2. Thursday, May 24, at the Division of Public Health, Edgehill location in Dover.
3. Tuesday, May 29, at the Milford State Service Center Annex.

The meetings included the history of the provision of Braille Materials and Preparation and highlights from the plan/timeline for implementation. Written public comments are being accepted through June 1, 2018.

Question arose: Is the timeline for comments posted anywhere?

Response: The Public Comment closing date was indicated on the Public Meeting Calendar as well as where to direct their comments.

## **DIVISION FOR THE VISUALLY IMPAIRED, VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION UNIT REPORT - Shirley Bryson**

- Current Caseload-261
- Total Individuals Employed - 24
- Successful Closures >90 days - 15
- Successful Closures <90 days - 9
- Individuals Ready to Work - 30
- Transition Aged Students (14-21) - 80
- Transition Aged Youth (14-24) – 102

### **Partnerships**

- Goodwill – (Job Resource Center)
- Delaware Technical Community College
- Panda Express
- Downtown Visions – Herbert Poe (HR/Safety Manager)

- Home Depot
- Radio One (Media Company)
- Brandywine School District (Education)
- New Castle County Chamber of Commerce
- Creativespirit-us.org - New organization working to develop a partnership. The primary focus of the organization is to match individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities with forward thinking companies who embrace the benefits of integrated employment.
- Planet Fitness
- RC Fabricators
- Aramark Janitorial

### **Transition Services**

DVI/VR has several opportunities for paid internships. There are seven interested NCC students and six Kent and Sussex students. The seven NCC students have been placed for the summer. The Kent and Sussex students are in the process of being placed.

DVI/VR has eight graduating high school seniors. A graduation celebration is planned on July 20, 2018 for college and high school students who graduated in 2017 and 2018. The graduation celebration will be held at the chapel on the DHSS campus.

Question arose: Do the students have all of the technology equipment required?

Response: Assessments have been done and remain ongoing. Education team, Technology team and the VR team are working together to obtain equipment the students require. Council would like to be notified if they could help with any delay in equipment.

Pathways Conference: Staff and transition students from The Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI) attended the Pathway Conference on April 27, 2018. Governor Carney was one of the keynote speakers. DVI was a partner in providing this opportunity to the public. The Pathways Conference workshops and speakers explored how Delaware's workforce system - businesses, educators, community organizations, and State agencies - could work together to equip all young people with the skills they need to compete in a global economy. Participants explored opportunities to build and strengthen school and community-based supports for students (including how to identify and pursue career pathways), understand, communicate and advise students on the variety of postsecondary options for youth, and support youth to continue their education to completion with a purpose. Two students from DVI presented on self-advocacy and self-determination. The audience was impressed by their stories and their determination to make a difference.

Summer Academy activities are being planned by VR, Education, and ILS. Activities include career development, independent living activities and more. The summer activities are scheduled for July 9, 2018 through July 20, 2018. The activities for the Summer Academy include Art therapy, nutrition and healthy eating workshops. This year Summer Academy will take place at Blindsight from 9:00 am – 2:30 pm. DABA is considering support for the program, possibly an athletic event. VR Transition Counselors are coordinating a visit to the Franklin Institute and the National Aquarium in Baltimore to explore various career opportunities. A final celebration for the summer academy will take place on July 20, 2018 at the chapel on the DHSS campus.

Question arose: Will DVI provide transportation to attend Summer Academy?

Response: DVI will provide transportation.

VR is exploring sending students to the space camp in September.

Several students will be participating in the National Federation of the Blind of Delaware Blind STEM program in Baltimore this summer.

Four students will be going to Kansas for a week long program, "Envision Level Up", from June 25th – July 2nd. The program is centered on technology and the students will receive, and be able to keep, laptops that are compatible with their school systems. The program will cover the 5 required activities of WIOA/Pre-ETS services: job exploration, counseling and guidance, post-secondary education, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy training.

Lloyd Schmitz requested information on this program; Shirley Bryson offered to send it to him. It was suggested that one could also google the Envision Level Up Program for additional information.

Deborah Bradl, reported that the Transition Conference will be held at Dover Downs on December 12, 2018. Since transportation has been an issue in the past, DVI has been proactive in discussing transportation and the schools participation at the meetings. Some schools transport students, if a school does not provide transportation, DVI will provide the transportation to the student.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

None reported at this time.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

### **Discussion on the elimination of the Division for the Visually Impaired (DVI)**

Considerable discussion took place on whether or not the Council is satisfied with the services of DVI. The intent is that an outside body, Joint Sunset Committee, review the effectiveness of DVI services. After many points of view were shared between the council members and the other individuals present, it was stated that DVI has continually improved and that they are making strides with the visually impaired community. Council members and members of the public that were present had a very engaged discussion. It was determined that at the present time there is no need for a request to the Joint Sunset Committee to perform an assessment or review of DVI. Jill Morrison offered that any individual who has concerns about DVI should contact her and that she would accept anonymous callers. Lloyd Schmitz made the recommendation that the discussions to eliminate the Division for the Visually Impaired be taken off of the agenda. Jillian Queen made the motion to remove the discussions on eliminating DVI from the agenda and was seconded by Deidre Morris. Motion Carried.

Lloyd Schmitz requested that at the meeting scheduled in August that DVI's director have a discussion with the GACB council regarding funding and expectations, needs, desires, etc. of the agency. The director responded that she supports the Governor's recommended budget and can speak to the resources the agency receives.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Members of the Public participated in the discussion above and had no further comments. Patti Addison announced the passing away of Fred Noesner, who had worked at the Blindsight store.

## **ADJOURNMENT:**

Deidre Morris made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Pat Carzo. Motion carried. Lloyd Schmitz adjourned the meeting at 12:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted by  
Michele Hamilton  
Administrative Specialist  
Division for the Visually Impaired